

## Go Vegetarian, At Least One Day A Week

*(Talk given by Ven. Prof. Dhammavihari to Sri Lanka Vegetarian Society on 8 January 2000)*

When you take the Three Refuges you indicate your acceptance of Buddhism. It is your initiation. After that you undertake to observe the five precepts. The five precepts constitute the foundation of Buddhist ethics. Among the five precepts the very first asks you to respect all life. You must ask why this is the first of the precepts. Obviously, what is of the greatest importance is the first. It is the pre-eminent determinant of the entire ethical life.

The philosophy of respect for life is grounded in the realisation that others also want to live, just as we do ourselves. We all fear weapons that bring about death. Life is dear to every one as it is to us. It is by examining our own attitude that we begin to appreciate the attitude of others to life. Buddhism recognises the right to life of every being, man or animal, big or small.

Remember that the very first act that Arhat Mahinda did in Sri Lanka was to order King Devanampiya Tissa to desist from killing a deer. The king obeyed the order without the least hesitation. Later many kings promulgated the ***Mā ghāta*** (Don't kill) rule in this country. That is our history.

But what has happened today? Of course our Buddhists will always claim to observe the first precept. They will say, we do not kill. But if you can bring out the contents of their stomachs, what will you see? How have all those fishes and chicken and various other animals got there? They have not killed these animals themselves. They have got the job done for them by others. When the trader sees that he has sold his 300 kilos of chicken by noon, he orders 600 for the next day. Who is responsible for the increase in killing? One doesn't need a lot of brains to know that it is the eater who is responsible. If all the Buddhists of Sri Lanka stay without eating flesh for a few days in succession, see what will

happen. If you profess to be observing the first precept and keep on eating animals, you are indulging in a tragic contradiction.

The Buddha has said in the Dhammika Sutta what the first precept is all about. There are three things that one observes by way of following this precept. One does not kill; one does not get others to kill and one does not approve the killing that others do. The last is what our %Buddhist; meat-eaters regularly flout in this country supposed to be devoted to the Dhamma.

But look at what is going on today in non-Buddhist countries like USA, UK, Australia etc. In these countries people are becoming vegetarian by lakhs and lakhs. Why do they do this? It is because they have begun to realise the true facts about meat eating. They do not want to have any part in the cruel slaughter that goes on in the factory farms and all the disasters that go with the mass killing of hapless animals. They are learning to respect the animals; right to life. Many of them even go further. They become vegan and give up buying all products that involve cruelty to animals, like bees; honey, dairy products, leather goods and cosmetics tested on animals in the process of manufacture. This is exemplary respect for animals; right to life and freedom from cruelty. This is real Ahimsa.

If you profess to be Buddhist, you have to eat cruelty-free food. Don't speak about "tri-koti-parisuddha" and such other things. The Buddha must have made this small exception for monks who begged for alms. They could not pick and choose, yet even they had to be sure that no animal was killed for them. How can lay people take cover behind this exception? Lay persons can very well pick and choose what they eat. They have no business to encourage killing by eating animals and offering animals as food to others. Remember that monks also cannot demand any particular food. Lay persons should not attempt to make monks eat what has been obtained by killing animals.

So let us take some practical steps. Let us make a start in showing our respect for all life. Let all Buddhists observe one day of the week, I suggest Saturday, as Family Vegetarian Day. Let us start our journey to compassionate

living in the new millennium. Once we have started on this course, we can later think of extending it, until we learn to eat cruelty-free food all round the year. Let all Vegetarian Societies take this message to the nation. Then we will begin to catch up with the progressive trends in other lands that are helping to change the world into a better place. It would be a tragic situation if others take the course of Ahimsa and Buddhists take the course of violence and killing.

Let us also learn to grow our own healthy organic foods. Surely each one of us can grow a little *goṭukola*, a *katurumurunga* plant, perhaps some *vetakolu* and *mālu miris* in our own gardens or even in pots in our backyards and balconies. All that you need is some soil, cow dung and water and the willingness to discard your laziness. I have been offered wholesome vegetarian food by Sri Lankan Buddhist devotees living in USA and Australia, using herbs and vegetables grown in their own compounds in this manner. I don't see why we cannot do the same in our own country.

I seriously suggest that all vegetarian activists in Sri Lanka should do every thing they can to implement this change-over to wholesome and cruelty-free living. I am prepared to support them 100% in this noble venture. We have had enough violence all around us. Each one of us must make it our personal responsibility to start on a course that will change this beautiful country of ours to the largely non-violent land that it was throughout most of its long history.